

**San Bruno mayor addresses Senate subcommittee
today on impacts of pipeline explosion**

San Bruno Mayor Jim Ruane today testified before a U.S. Senate subcommittee on the impacts on the city of the Sept. 9 pipeline explosion and fire.

He gave testimony to the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine Infrastructure, Safety and Security. The Mayor spoke at the invitation of Sen. Barbara Boxer on “Pipeline Safety: Assessing the San Bruno, California Explosion and Other Recent Accidents.” Boxer chaired a majority of the session.

These are his remarks:

**U. S. Senate Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant
Marine Infrastructure, Safety and Security**

**“Pipeline Safety: Assessing the San Bruno, California Explosion and
Other Recent Accidents”**

**Testimony of Jim Ruane, Mayor
City of San Bruno, California
September 28, 2010**

Thank you Chairman Lautenberg, Ranking Member Thune, and in particular Senators Boxer and Feinstein for inviting me to testify. My name is Jim Ruane, and I am the proud Mayor of the wonderful City of San Bruno, California.

I am here today to give voice to the residents of San Bruno whose hearts were broken on the awful evening of September 9, 2010, but whose spirit remains strong and resilient.

A place called San Bruno

Let me tell you a little bit about San Bruno. We are a solid working-class community of nearly 44,000 located in the sophisticated urban environment of the San Francisco Peninsula, immediately adjacent to the San Francisco International Airport. We have a unique identity in the region as a somewhat old-fashioned, unassuming community with a positive, can-do attitude about life.

I often tell people that San Bruno is the closest to a slice of “American pie” that you could ever experience.

The Glenview area where the explosion occurred is a hillside neighborhood of nearly 400 homes built around the Crestmoor Canyon Open Space.

The night of September 9, 2010

The explosion occurred at dinnertime on a Thursday evening, just as residents were settling in for another typical night at home and perhaps to watch the first NFL game of the season. The neighborhood was shaken out of its routine with a thunderous disturbance that some mistook at first for an earthquake or an airplane crash. The deafening sound of a fireball roaring 100-feet overhead and 2,000-degree flames overtook the homes. Our residents ran for their lives with just the clothes on their back.

What we now know is that a 30-inch Pacific Gas & Electric Co. high-pressure natural gas transmission line running through the Glenview neighborhood exploded. Police and fire first-responders from all over our region converged on the area, only to discover that the explosion had knocked out the main water line. I immediately drove to the scene and then helplessly watched from afar as the gas line spewed unabated for over an hour until it could be capped.

One observer later said, "It looked like hell on Earth."

The response

More than 400 first-responders gallantly battled the six-alarm inferno by dragging 3,000 feet of fire lines from an adjoining neighborhood where our water department was able to locate water. As the fire spread rapidly into the adjacent Crestmoor Canyon, air strike teams sprayed fire retardant foam to prevent the fire from engulfing the canyon and the neighborhoods on the other side. Citizen-responders drove those with second-degree burns to nearby hospitals so that emergency crews could focus on the most severely burned and on preventing more lives from being lost.

Within the first hour of the explosion being reported, we had set up an incident command center at the site, evacuated nearly 1,000 residences and activated our emergency operations center at City Hall. Fortunately, we received a flood of assistance not only from our own city workers, but our residents, San Mateo County and state emergency officials, dozens of surrounding police and fire agencies, and relief agencies.

We opened an evacuation center for displaced residents that night, had a one-stop local assistance center up and running by the next day and soon were inspecting the impacted homes in the Glenview neighborhood for damage. Some have said our response was a "textbook" example of how

to handle a crisis of epic size like this – I want to say that it was a team effort involving the tremendous expertise and passion of so many people and agencies coming together to support San Bruno.

We now know that the most devastating outcome of the explosion and fire was the loss of eight lives that night. And yes, I said eight. The last fatality was just confirmed to us.

There were other awful consequences as well:

- 66 persons were reported burned and injured including four firefighters who suffered smoke inhalation. At least 4 residents remain in critical condition today from their burns, and they face long and difficult recoveries.
- Thirty-seven homes were destroyed, 18 remain uninhabitable and another 32 suffered less serious damage.
- A large crater and dirt road now cut through Glenview, with a fence surrounding the exposed pipeline, the sad rubble of a children's playground and the dozens of charred homes and their barren chimneys sitting as a grim reminder of the tragedy we experienced.

The aftermath

Within 48 hours, teams of building inspectors had completed inspection of the 377 evacuated homes in the 10-acre blast zone. That Saturday we convened a Town Hall meeting that drew over 600 residents.

By Sunday morning, less than 72 hours from the explosion, we had coordinated a neighborhood re-entry program that allowed 299 families to return home. Over the next few days those who lost their homes were allowed to return and sift through the rubble for any personal items they could find.

The following days were surreal for our community – funerals and vigils, potlucks, fundraising events, press conferences and a nationwide offering of condolences. People from across the world contacted us to lend their support. While this became an international news story about pipeline safety, for us it always was about getting our hometown, San Bruno, back on its feet.

Today crews are clearing the debris so that the rebuilding process can begin. This week we are beginning a new program to give even more targeted, one-on-one assistance to those 55 families who will be displaced from their homes and their neighborhood for some time to come.

We will leave it to the experts including investigators from the National Transportation Safety Board to determine how and why this happened. These investigations will be vital to ensuring that this type of tragedy never occurs again and that no other community will be subjected to the horror that we continue to experience.

For now we know that this incident cost precious lives, incinerated a neighborhood, caused over \$50 million in physical damages and counting, and forever changed San Bruno. I can also say that it's made a determined and resilient town even more determined and more resilient.

As one retired firefighter who lost his home in the blaze said, "I'm going to be the first person to move back in, with the city help, of course. The faster I can move forward, the less I think of the past."

You may be asking yourself what can the federal government do to help San Bruno. Fire and foremost, the federal government should take all necessary actions to assure that this never happens again. The City of San Bruno, already struggling, does not have the resources to cover the costs of the response and the long-term consequences of this disaster. I am very disappointed with the recent determination by FEMA to deny federal resources. Your support for our appeal is vital to San Bruno's future.

Thank you for your time today, and thank you for your continued prayers for the City of San Bruno.